

House Republican Press Release

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2006 Legislative Wrap-up



*By State Rep. Toni Boucher, R-143, Wilton,
Norwalk*

I am happy to report that the legislature agreed to several initiatives to hold down spending, protect the environment, help families save for college education, improve transportation and stimulate job growth. If you would like further information, please visit our website at www.housegop.ct.gov. Following are some of the highlights:

Voting for Job Creation

Connecticut continues to lag the nation in new jobs and economic growth. As a result, I fought for legislation to roll back some of the high taxes that make Connecticut uncompetitive with other states and nations. The property tax on manufacturing equipment will be phased out, the corporate tax surcharge that was reimposed last year will be eliminated and tax credits will encourage companies to hire employees and produce movies in Connecticut.

To promote the growth of small microbusiness and emerging industries, new legislation will promote innovation through faculty recruitment and an entrepreneurial center at UConn, funds for small business incubators, and programs to finance early stage ventures and to match federal research assistance. The state will establish pilot math and science grant programs and student loan repayment for engineering and doctoral students. Several initiatives will promote research in the growing field of nanotechnology, a branch of engineering that deals with the design and manufacture of extremely small electronic circuits and mechanical devices built at the molecular level of matter.

For the Environment

Under a Clean Cars bill, the state will establish a greenhouse gas labeling program for new motor vehicles starting with 2009 models. Also, new legislation also will require public notification about contaminated sites and private drinking water wells.

For Transportation

At my urging, the state will begin upgrading the Danbury branch commuter line through Wilton and Norwalk. And water and restroom facilities will be added to the Cannondale Station. With my strong support, the legislature authorized a 10-year, \$2.3-billion transportation package in addition to last year's \$1.3-billion plan that included 342 new cars for the Metro-North commuter rail line. Future authorized projects include more commuter rail service, stations and parking facilities and removal of I-95 bottlenecks.

For Property Owners

The legislature created an Ombudsman for Property Rights to help property owners with eminent domain disputes. That is a start, but I supported stronger legislation to restrict government ability to take private property for economic development.

For Seniors/Veterans/Healthcare

A new law allows towns and cities to freeze property taxes for homes owned by people age 70 or older. Homeowner-companion agencies must register with the Department of Consumer Protection and employees must undergo background checks. Legislation will protect jobs and finances of National Guard members who are called up for state service such as natural disasters, just as if called up for national service. The legislature updated Connecticut law on end of life decisions, hospital acquired infections and umbilical cord blood banking.

For Children, Education

I continued the fight for more state aid for local public schools under the state's Education Cost Sharing formula. Some state school aid increases were approved, but at less than full funding. Good news is that families can now take a state income tax deduction when they save up to \$10,000 for a child's education in the Connecticut Higher Education Trust (CHET). With my support, the legislature approved \$875 million in local school construction reimbursements including increased grants for reauthorized projects.

Legislation on Unfinished Issues

The legislative majority declined to take action on many important issues, which must be at the top of the agenda for the next legislative session. They include:

- Eminent domain reform, limiting the power of government to take private property for economic development projects
- Repeal of the annual car tax as Gov. Rell proposes
- Reform or repeal of the Connecticut estate tax to was reinstated retroactive to January 1, 2005.
- Action to address health care costs for small business, which are identified as one of the major problems for small business in the state.

State Budget

Adjustments were made to the state budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2006. The budget provides \$245.7 million for the underfunded Teachers' Retirement System, \$85.5 million to pay off debt from the 2003 fiscal crisis, \$33 million in property tax relief to the towns and at least \$137 million saved in the state Rainy Day Fund for future economic downturns and other emergencies.

Grants to towns increase by \$115.5 million to \$2.557 billion for Fiscal Year 2007. Aid for special education students goes up by \$35 million. Taxpayers can take a property tax credit of up to \$500 when filing 2006 state income returns, up from \$400. A \$1-million program for adults with autism also is authorized.

To reform or repeal the Connecticut estate tax that was reimposed in 2005, I cosponsored several amendments on the House floor. They were rejected by the Democratic majority. Gov. Rell proposed to eliminate the annual car tax, which also was not enacted by the majority.

Underage Drinking

The legislature made it illegal to knowingly permit a minor other than one's own child to illegally possess alcohol on his or her property or fail to make reasonable efforts to stop the possession of alcohol on the property by a minor he or she knows possesses alcohol illegally. Authorities cannot enter your home without a legal search warrant. The bill makes a first offense an infraction. Subsequent offenses will be subject to up to one year in prison, a fine of up to \$500, or both. That becomes effective October 1, 2006.

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If you would like information on these or any other state issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at my Capitol office 1-800-842-1423 or by e-mail at

Toni.Boucher@housegop.ct.gov. Thank you.

Rep. Boucher serves the 143rd Assembly District of Wilton and Norwalk in the state House of Representatives.